



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

We make Indiana a cleaner, healthier place to live.

Frank O'Bannon
Governor

Lori F. Kaplan
Commissioner

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www.in.gov/idem

January, 2003

Dear Indiana School:

Re: Mercury in Schools

Schools and school science labs often contain mercury and mercury-containing products. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the Indiana Department of Education are writing to inform all Indiana schools of a law that will soon be in effect related to mercury and schools. The 2001 Indiana State Legislature passed House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1901 (Public Law 225-2001), adding new provisions to Indiana State Law that restricts and, in some cases, bans the use, distribution, and disposal of mercury and mercury-containing products. According to the law, **after July 1, 2003, public and nonpublic schools may not purchase or use mercury commodities, mercury compounds or other mercury-added instructional aids in primary and secondary classrooms.** The only exceptions to this ban are measuring devices and thermometers for which no adequate substitute exists for use in laboratories. Mercury-containing items such as thermostats and fluorescent lamps are still permitted inside buildings. **Recycling and disposal of mercury-containing items will be necessary. Proper recycling or disposal is imperative.**

Mercury's threat to the environment and to our children cannot be overstated.

Consider these facts about mercury:

- Children are more vulnerable to mercury poisoning because they have not yet developed the natural barrier that protects the brain and central nervous system from neurotoxins such as mercury.
- In extreme cases, mercury poisoning can cause severe mental impairments in people of all ages.
- Breathing mercury vapors can be dangerous, especially over long periods of time.
- One drop (3.0 grams) of mercury can poison an entire lake or stream.
- Approximately 0.5 grams of mercury are found in household fever thermometers while 3.0 grams are in a typical thermostat.

A letter was mailed to your school in January of 1999 from the Indiana Household Hazardous Waste Task Force urging your school to become mercury free and have any mercury-containing items properly recycled. At that time, several schools around Indiana began working with the Department of Environmental Management and their local Solid Waste Management District (SWMD) to properly recycle or dispose of the mercury from their respective schools. In November of 2001, another letter was sent from the U.S. EPA Region 5 Administrator to all Indiana schools urging the same action. To date, only 58 of Indiana's 2,841 schools have officially become "mercury free."

To help your school comply with HEA 1901, you are again encouraged to work with your local SWMD to properly dispose of mercury and mercury-containing items found in your school.

The Indiana SWMDs have the capability to receive, store, and properly recycle or dispose of mercury. In most cases, you will be responsible to get the mercury items to your SWMD and they will handle the process from there. **To be eligible to receive this service from your SWMD, all you must do is sign the form, "Mercury Reduction and Recycling for Schools Pledge Program"** (on the Internet at <http://www.in.gov/idem/kids/mercury/schoolpledge.pdf>) and send it back to IDEM by mailing to:

Chad Trinkle
Environmental Education Coordinator
IDEM - Office of Planning and Assessment
100 North Senate Avenue
P.O. Box 6015
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6015
800-451-6027 or 317-233-9479
www.in.gov/idem/kids

or by fax at 317-233-6647. IDEM will pay for 75% of the costs associated with the packing, transportation, and recycling of the mercury via the Mercury Awareness Program and our recycling grant dollars. The remaining 25% may be the responsibility of your school. Please contact your respective SWMD (a listing of local SWMDs is on the Internet at <http://www.state.in.us/idem/oppta/recycling/swmd/contact.pdf>) to discuss any minimal fees for this program. If your school is located within Marion County, please contact the City of Indianapolis at 317-327-4TOX (4869) or via e-mail at ERMD@indygov.org.

This partnership with the SWMDs and the City of Indianapolis does not provide for the recycling of fluorescent lamps. Fluorescent lamps are an excellent, efficient means of lighting, yet they contain mercury and are hazardous if broken. Recycling is the best management practice for these lamps. A list of private lamp recycling outlets can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.in.gov/idem/ctap/mercury/recyclers.pdf> for your convenience. Fluorescent lamp recycling may also be available through your SWMD.

A Fact Sheet (online at <http://www.in.gov/idem/kids/mercury/mercuryschoolfactsheet.pdf>) specific to Indiana schools and HEA 1901 is also available to serve as a quick reference as you are working to rid your school of mercury. Additional information regarding the requirements of HEA 1901 can be found on IDEM's Web site at <http://www.in.gov/idem/mercury>. IDEM will also provide technical assistance to help answer any questions that may come up during this process. For technical assistance on mercury products and proper disposal methods, call IDEM's Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance at 800-988-7901.

We look forward to working with your school corporation to make Indiana a cleaner, healthier place to live and continue the safety of Indiana's educational facilities for our children. Please don't hesitate to call us with any questions you may have about HEA 1901. For questions about HEA 1901, call IDEM's Office of Planning and Assessment at 800-451-6027, extension 233-0701.

Sincerely,



Lori F. Kaplan
Commissioner
IN Department of Environmental Management



Dr. Suellen Reed
Superintendent of Public Instruction
IN Department of Education

Enclosures